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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PINR](#) [BL](#)  
SUBJECT: BOLIVIA: JOAQUINO GROUP PLANS "THIRD OPTION"

Classified By: A/DCM Mike Hammer reasons 1.4 b,d

¶1. (C) Summary: On May 15, Emboff met with Rene JOAQUINO Cabrera, mayor of the town of Potosi and leader of the small opposition group Alianza Social (Social Alliance, or AS.) Representatives of the regional opposition recently noted that AS was fielding a candidate in the upcoming prefect election in Chuquisaca, where the ruling Movement Toward Socialism (MAS) prefect has stepped down. Our contacts felt that the opposition should stand together against the MAS in all departments, arguing that if the AS wants support in Potosi it should stay out of Chuquisaca. Joaquino explained that he wants to project his AS party as a "third option" and therefore, it was important to try to establish a national following, hence AS was running a candidate in Chuquisaca even though there were no real prospects for winning. End summary.

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Opening up a "Third Option" for Chuquisaca  
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¶2. (C) Joaquino confirmed that AS will field a candidate in the Chuquisaca prefectural elections, saying "The people are tired of the opposition and the MAS: it's time for a third option." Although he admitted that an AS candidate may draw votes away from the other opposition candidate, he said he feels that AS can also draw votes away from the MAS candidate: "We will come in second in the capital and in the countryside: in Sucre we will come in second to the opposition, and in the countryside we will come in second to the MAS."

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A Third Option for Bolivia, As Well  
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¶3. (C) Joaquino described the proposed recall referenda for all prefects as a windfall for AS, saying that AS was prepared to run a candidate in each department where a prefect loses the recall. Joaquino conceded that AS is unlikely to win a prefectural vote any department, but he said that this is its chance to move from being a regional party to a national one. When asked about the possibility of a presidential election if President Evo Morales loses his recall referendum, Joaquino jokingly signaled himself, "We

have a candidate for that election, too." (Note: Despite participating as part of a coalition in the 2002 presidential elections, Joaquino has not been a candidate for the presidency in past elections. End note.)

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Recalling Evo  
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¶4. (C) Joaquino outlined why he feels Evo's position entering a recall referendum is weaker than popularly thought. He listed groups whom Evo has "lost" since the 2006 election: miners; health workers (unemployed Bolivian doctors are annoyed by Evo's focus on Cuban doctors); teachers; the middle class; and small and medium enterprises.

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Not Playing the Race Card  
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¶5. (C) As a Quechua and currently the traditional leader of his hometown, Joaquino is often mentioned when pundits predict a potential indigenous challenger to Evo. Joaquino himself, however, denies that his indigenous identity would be part of any potential platform. "First, Evo claims to be the first indigenous president but he isn't. He's the third indigenous president; the first two just didn't talk about it. Secondly, he's not indigenous, he's mestizo. Morales is a Spanish name. He's mestizo (mixed-race) like I am: Cabrera is Spanish, too." Joaquino commented that, unlike himself, Evo does not speak any indigenous language fluently. When Emboff asked if emphasizing his indigenousness might help Joaquino, he emphatically denied it: "In the future, (emphasizing your identity) may even work against a candidate. People will say, 'We tried that, and look how it turned out.'"

¶6. (C) Joaquino emphasized that he would avoid choosing other AS candidates based on racial identity. "In Alianza Social you can be black, white, or indigenous, male or female, even sexual orientation doesn't matter, that's clear in our rules. Leadership depends on quality, not identity." When Emboff mentioned that sometimes politicians find it expedient to tell voters what they want to hear, Joaquino shook his head quickly. "I speak the truth, even when it's not popular." As examples, he mentioned his local campaign to convince people in his community to include modern designs in their houses. "You can still use the same material, but add innovations for the same price. Why should you cook in a smoky kitchen just because your grandmother did?" Pointing to his athletic jacket (in contrast to Evo's sweaters and suits with indigenous-cloth inserts), Joaquino said, "Men walk around in (the traditional garb) of short pants and sandals. If there are better ways to keep warm, you can incorporate them." He laughed. "It doesn't matter if we're in favor of globalization or not: it's here."

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Not a Party of One  
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¶7. (C) Joaquino went to great lengths to explain that AS is not a one-man party, "If I die tomorrow, Alianza Social will continue." He views his party as being in the Bolivian political game for the long term, and therefore does not seem particularly worried at its slow start (currently AS has limited local representation in a few small mayorships and had six representatives on the Constituent Assembly, with no representation in Congress or the Senate. At the moment, AS is still primarily a departmental party, with significant presence only in Potosi.) Although he does not want to remain the face of Alianza Social, he seems aware that currently he is the party's main asset: "A few months ago I visited El Alto (a MAS stronghold) and I walked through the streets. Some people even gave me the thumbs up and said, 'Go Rene!'"

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Comment

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¶8. (C) Although Joaquinó claims to reject the race card, he owes his national prominence to the fact that he is Quechua, a member of the largest indigenous group in Bolivia and therefore a potential indigenous alternative to Evo. Regardless of Joaquinó's racially-blind rhetoric, the fact of Bolivia is that the majority of voters now self-identify as indigenous, and Evo owes much of his popularity to his indigenous identity (hence his constant references to it.) Based on his current plans, Joaquinó seems unlikely to give up his political party and become an indigenous figurehead for the rest of the opposition. Recent conflicts between national and regional opposition representatives have shown that Bolivia's opposition has difficulty uniting, even to beat Evo. End comment.

¶9. (U) Bio Note: Joaquinó was a 2003 International Visitor participant and participated in a 2007 MILGP security cooperation orientation visit. The Japanese Embassy in La Paz informs us that they have nominated him for one of their international visitor programs to Tokyo.

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